

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com   |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Gregory, Frederick  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory,   |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | January 23, 2023 and July 27, 2007  |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2007 and 2023   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 14 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:53:09).   |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | Federal government administrator and aircraft commander Col. Frederick Drew Gregory (1941 - ) was an astronaut, the first African American space commander and the first African American Deputy Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Gregory was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 23, 2023 and July 27, 2007, in Annapolis, Maryland. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2007_215   |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.   |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Federal government administrator and aircraft commander Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Sr. was born on January 7, 1941 in Washington, D.C. to Francis and Nora Gregory. The nephew of medical pioneer Dr. Charles Drew, Gregory grew up in a tight-knit family in Washington, D.C. He developed an interest in flying as a teenager and frequently attended air shows. After graduating from Anacostia High School in 1958, Gregory briefly attended Amherst College and American University before enrolling in the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He received his B.S. degree in 1964 and later obtained his M.S. degree in information systems from George Washington University in 1977.

Upon graduating from the U.S. Air Force Academy, Gregory underwent pilot training for a year before serving in Vietnam as a rescue pilot. He earned numerous military decorations, including the Distinguished Flying Cross in 1967. Gregory returned to the United States, where he was assigned as a missile support helicopter pilot flying the UH-1F at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri. In 1970, Gregory was selected for test pilot school before being loaned to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) as an engineering test pilot in 1972. At the suggestion of General Benjamin Davis, the first African American general in the Air Force and a former Tuskegee Airman, Gregory applied to the astronaut training program in 1976 and was selected as one of thirty-five astronauts by NASA in 1978.

In April 1985, Gregory's first mission to space on the space shuttle Challenger launched from Kennedy Space Center. He served as the lead capsule communicator during the 1986 Challenger accident in which all seven astronauts onboard were killed. In 1989, Gregory became the first African American space commander when he commanded the mission STS-33 on board the space shuttle Discovery. With the completion of his third space mission on the space shuttle Atlantis in 1991, Gregory was appointed Associate Administrator, Office of Safety and Mission Quality at the NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. In 1993, Gregory retired as a colonel from

the Air Force after logging more than 6,976 hours of flying time in over fifty types of aircraft and 550 combat missions in Vietnam. Gregory continued to work with NASA and in 2001 was promoted to NASA Deputy Administrator. After head Administrator Sean O’Keefe left NASA, Gregory served as Acting Administrator of NASA, the first African American to hold this position.

Gregory and his wife Barbara Archer have two adult children, Frederick and Heather.

Col. Frederick Gregory was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on July 27, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory was conducted by Cheryl Butler and Larry Crowe on January 23, 2023 and July 27, 2007, in Annapolis, Maryland, and was recorded on 14 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Federal government administrator and aircraft commander Col. Frederick Drew Gregory (1941 - ) was an astronaut, the first African American space commander and the first African American Deputy Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Gregory, Frederick

Butler, Cheryl (Interviewer)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Gregory, Frederick--Interviews

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African American astronauts--Interviews.

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African American pilots--Interviews.

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United States--Armed Forces--African American officers--Interviews.

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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United States. Air Force.

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## Occupations:

Aircraft Commander

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MilitaryMakers

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## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, January 23, 2023 and July 27, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:32 ?

Col. Frederick Drew Gregory was born on January 7, 1941 in Washington, D.C. to Nora Drew Gregory and Francis Gregory. His maternal grandparents were carpet layer Richard Drew, who was one of the few black members of his trade union; and Nora Burrell Drew, an alumnus of the Miner Normal School in Washington, D.C., where Gregory's mother was born in 1913. She grew up in Arlington, Virginia, and her siblings included Dr. Charles R. Drew, who conducted pioneering research in blood transfusion, and served as the chief of surgery at Howard University until his death in 1950. Gregory's paternal grandparents were schoolteacher Edna Gregory and minister James Francis Gregory, who was a graduate of Howard University's inaugural class. Gregory's father was born in 1907 in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He graduated from the Case Institute of Technology in Cleveland, Ohio, and became a school administrator. Gregory grew up in Washington, D.C., where he began his education at Lucretia Mott Elementary School.

African American families--Washington (D.C.).

Drew, Charles, 1904-1950.

African Americans--Education (Elementary)--Washington (D.C.).

African American teachers.

Segregation in education--Washington (D.C.).

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:12 ?

Col. Frederick Drew Gregory grew up in the Southeast neighborhood of Washington, D.C, where he belonged to Jack and Jill of America, and frequented the movie theaters on U Street. He aspired to become a pilot after reading books about flying and meeting members of the Tuskegee Airmen, who were friends of his parents, Nora Drew Gregory and Francis Gregory. In the Northwest district of Washington, D.C., Gregory attended the segregated Lucretia Mott Elementary School and Benjamin Banneker Junior High School. After the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka decision in 1954, he enrolled at the majority white John Philip Sousa Junior High School, and then attended Anacostia High School, where he played varsity baseball. Upon graduating in 1958, Gregory enrolled at Amherst College, and then transferred to the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado. He was not accepted on his first attempt; but, after being nominated by Congressman Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., was admitted to the class of 1964.

African Americans--Social life and customs--Washington (D.C.).

Segregation in education--Washington (D.C.).

School integration--Washington (D.C.).

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Washington (D.C.).

United States. Army Air Forces. Fighter Group, 332nd.

African American pilots.

United States Air Force Academy.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_001\_003,  
TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Col. Frederick Drew Gregory matriculated in 1960 at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado. There were very few African Americans in his class, and he formed close friendships with white cadets like Herb Bevelhymmer and Trusten McArtor. During basic training, an officer named Robert Carter told a racist joke, but apologized after being confronted by several cadets. At the academy, Gregory studied military engineering, and played rugby. He graduated in 1964, and married his high school sweetheart, Barbara Archer Gregory. While traveling after their wedding, they were denied service at a motel in Tennessee on account of their race. Later in 1964, Gregory was stationed at the Randolph Air Force Base in Texas, where he was assigned to fly rescue helicopters. He was reassigned to fly fighter planes in 1969. During the 1960s, Gregory became more aware of the Civil Rights Movement, and admired Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

African Americans--Marriage.

Hotels--Southern states.

Segregation--Southern States.

African American pilots.

United States Air Force Academy.

United States--Armed Forces--African American officers.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_001\_004,  
TRT: 0:29:32 ?

Col. Frederick Drew Gregory served in the U.S. Air Force as a helicopter pilot from 1966 at the Da Nang Air Base in Vietnam, where his duties included rescuing U.S. Marines from the field. He recalls the smell of napalm on the battlefields. He also watched hundreds of movies during his downtime on the air base. Before leaving Vietnam in June 1967, Gregory briefly stayed in Saigon, where there were covert North Vietnamese troops in the city. He was then stationed at the Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, where he learned of the protests against the Vietnam War. Later, he trained to fly F-4 jet fighter planes at the Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Arizona. In 1970, Gregory began his test pilot training at the Naval Air Station Patuxent River in Maryland; and, in 1974, he was transferred to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) on the recommendation of General Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. Gregory was accepted into the NASA astronaut corps in 1978.

African American pilots.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--African Americans.

Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Campaigns--Vietnam--Đà Nẵng.

United States--Armed Forces--African American officers.

African American test pilots.

African American astronauts.

Davis, Benjamin O. (Benjamin Oliver), 1912-2002.

McNair, Ronald E., 1950-1986.

Bluford, Guion Stewart, 1942-.

Bolden, Charles, 1946-.

United States. National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_001\_005,  
TRT: 0:31:06 ?

Col. Frederick Drew Gregory joined the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in 1974, and met Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins, who conducted the Apollo 11 moon landing mission. In 1982, Gregory joined T. Wendell Butler's Young Astronauts program, which educated children about aeronautical careers. In 1985, Gregory flew into space for the first time as the pilot of the Challenger space shuttle, and served as the alternate for the mission's planned spacewalk. The next year, Gregory was stationed at Mission Control as the capsule communicator for the mission that ended in the Challenger disaster, when the shuttle exploded shortly after takeoff. Gregory recalls his friendships with the astronauts who were killed, including Dick Scobee, Ellison S. Onizuka, Judith A. Resnik and Christa McAuliffe. In 1990, Gregory and his wife, Barbara Archer Gregory, served as U.S. government representatives to Madagascar, where they researched an ancestor who may have originated there in the early 1800s.

African American astronauts.

Challenger (Spacecraft)--Accidents.

Space race--United States.

Apollo 11 (Spacecraft).

Armstrong, Neil, 1930-.

Aldrin, Buzz.

Collins, Michael, 1930-.

African American families.

African Americans--Relations with Africans.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_001\_006,  
TRT: 0:22:26 ?

Col. Frederick Drew Gregory commanded space shuttle missions in 1989 and 1991. As commander, his aims included classified U.S. Department of Defense operations, and research on muscle atrophy in zero gravity. He also describes his experiences of readjusting to the Earth's gravity after returning from space. Gregory retired as an astronaut in 1992, and became an administrator at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) in Washington, D.C. He was promoted to deputy administrator of NASA in 2002, and served in that capacity until 2005. Gregory then retired, and spent his time traveling with his wife, Barbara Archer Gregory. He also advised NASA personnel and U.S. military officers about retirement fund management. Gregory talks about his acquaintances with Presidents Ronald Wilson Reagan and George H.W. Bush, as well as First Lady Barbara Bush. He concludes the interview by describing how he would like to be remembered, and sharing a message to future generations.

African American astronauts.

Reagan, Ronald.

Bush, George, 1924-.

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_002\_007,

TRT: 7:30:20 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_002\_008,  
TRT: 8:29:41 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_002\_009,  
TRT: 9:29:32 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_002\_010,  
TRT: 10:30:18 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_002\_011,  
TRT: 11:28:08 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_002\_012,  
TRT: 12:31:26 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_002\_013,  
TRT: 13:31:13 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Col. Frederick Drew Gregory, Section A2007\_215\_002\_014,  
TRT: 14:33:23 ?